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Alexandria's oldest artifact excavated; more expected

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Archaeologists have discovered Alexandria's oldest known artifact while excavating the site of a Civil War cemetery, proving that American Indians lived in the area more than 10,000 years ago.

The fragment of a clovis spear point is estimated to be up to 13,000 years old, said Michael Johnson, a Fairfax County archaeologist who specializes in early American Indian artifacts and volunteers on the Alexandria dig.

The discovery of the clovis point provides the first concrete evidence that American Indians were in Alexandria as early as the Paleoindian period, Francine Bromberg, city preservation archaeologist, said in a statement. The Paleoindian period lasted from about 18,000 years ago to about 12,000 years ago.

"I think there's still promise here for [items from] 13,000 to 8,500 years ago at this site," Johnson said.

Clovis points are recognized by their distinctive shape, without

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notches or a stem. The tips are flattened to make them thinner. Seven have been found in Fairfax County, another one or two in Arlington. This is Alexandria's first.

Since May, Alexandria archaeologists have been excavating a site near the intersection of Washington Street and the Beltway.

During the Civil War, about 1,800 escaped slaves and free blacks were buried there. The archaeologists started work to locate as many of the graves as possible before the property is turned into a memorial park.

The site overlooking Cameron Run was probably a residential spot for American Indians, considering the number and different kinds of tools found, Johnson said.

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The fragment of a clovis spear, pictured above, is estimated to be up to 13,000 years old. Archeologists discovered the artifact while excavating the site of a Civil War cemetery. – Courtesy photo